

more important, it is amenable to practical literary criticism. It continues to exert an ever-growing influence on the development of reader-response criticism.

### Reading

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**Islamic philosophy** A philosophical tradition whose historical, linguistic, and religious parameters are still a matter of some dispute. The tradition is referred to variously as "Arabic," "Islamic," or "Muslim" philosophy. These names are sometimes used interchangeably, although they have different implications. The concept of an "Arabic philosophy" can be traced back to the medieval Christian Latins, who used the term to describe the enormous body of philosophical work that they appropriated from Islamic lands. It is first and foremost a linguistic, rather than ethnic or geographical, category. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century orientlists inherited the rubric, and even today a significant number of scholars – mostly Western, but not exclusively – continue to employ it. Yet over the past fifty years or so, it has encountered increasing suspicion.

There are numerous reasons for this, some of which simply have to do with contingent facts about the term's effective history. One is that the traditional framework of Arabic philosophy tended arbitrarily to privilege the classical period, specifically those thinkers who were most influenced by Greek philosophy. The standard story was that Arabic philosophy emerged in the ninth century out of the great Greco-Arabic translation project, was inspired by Greek philosophy (which provided it with its central concepts and techniques), and was shaped to a large extent by

the increasingly evident tensions between reason and faith. Much ink was spilled, for example, over questions concerning the createdness or eternity of the world, the nature of God, the existence of divine attributes over and above God's essence, God's causal relation to the world, whether God knows temporal particulars (and thus is aware of what we do, rewarding and punishing us in an appropriate way), the nature of the human soul or intellect and its afterlife, the good life for human beings, and whether the tools of logic can help us achieve certainty independently of divine revelation.

According to traditional accounts of Arabic philosophy, its founding figure was al-Kindī, who played a pivotal role in the translation movement, legitimized the appropriation of foreign wisdom, and was the first to weld Greek philosophical doctrines onto the worldview of Islam. Its two most representative figures were the Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*) philosophers al-Fārābī (L: Alfarabius) and Ibn Sīnā (L: Avicenna), who internalized Greek logic and constructed the ambitious metaphysical systems that synthesized Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Islamic ideas. Its *bête noir* was the Ash'arite theologian and Sūfī mystic al-Ghazālī, who critiqued the philosophers according to their own methods of proof and ultimately accused them of unbelief. Its final flowering was the great Andalusian polymath Ibn Rushd (L: Averroës), who provided a powerful response to al-Ghazālī's criticisms and went on to retrieve the true sense of Aristotle's thought through his extensive commentarial project. However, by that time the tide had effectively turned against philosophy in the Islamic world, according to the traditional Western account. After the death of Ibn Rushd at the end of the twelfth century, it was quickly eclipsed by theology and mysticism. Anomalies like Ibn Khaldūn aside, philosophical thought had run its course in the Islamic world. Luckily, the achievements of Arabic philosophers had begun to be recognized by Christian scholars, and another ambitious translation project – this time from Arabic to Latin – was initiated. The Scholastic tradition profited enormously from the translations, commentaries, and careful systematic interpretations they inherited. In short, Arabic philosophers preserved Greek learning during a period of intellectual stultification in

the West and ultimately made it possible for Christian Europe to reconnect with, and gather vitality from, its classical roots. Indeed, the chief value of Arabic philosophy lay in its preservative and transmissive role: apart from that it contributed little of new value to the Greek heritage (Boer, 1901/67; Walzer, 1962).

This story is not entirely wrong: Greek thought did indeed have a considerable early impact on Arabic philosophy, there were significant conceptual tensions between Greek philosophical doctrines and Islamic revelation, and Christian scholars certainly put the achievements of Arabic philosophers to good use. However, it is misleading for several reasons. I shall set aside the more heavy-handed Orientalist assumptions scattered throughout this story and focus only on points of direct and obvious philosophical relevance (for discussions of the former, see SAID, 1979; Mahdi, 1990).

First, in focusing predominately on Greek influences, accounts of this sort cannot help but underestimate the original and unique indigenous contributions of philosophers in the Islamic milieu, as well as the Qur'anic, pre-Islamic Arab, Persian, and Indian sources they also drew upon. Al-Kindī's prophetic dictum that we should take the truth wherever we find it applies not just to the Greeks, but to any nation or people from which Muslims might gain knowledge. Further, by valorizing the achievements of Arabic philosophy primarily in terms of their instrumental utility for European beneficiaries, we overlook the intrinsic value of the tradition as understood on its own terms. Indeed, it forces us to view the tradition in a very selective and distorted way, since what may have been important to the Latins was not always as important to their Arabic brethren, and vice versa. A case in point here would be Ibn Rushd. In Western histories, he is cast as the final, enormously important figure in the Arabic philosophical lineage. And he was important – first to the Scholastics, then to European ENLIGHTENMENT thinkers, and later to Arab modernists. In Islamic accounts, however, he is generally a peripheral figure with no real students – just one relatively minor moment in a tradition that continues beyond the twelfth century up to the present day. His reply to al-Ghazālī's critique of Ibn Sīnā had very little impact within the Islamic context, as compared, for example, to

al-Ṭūsī's replies to al-Sharastānī's and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's critique of Ibn Sīnā, which were enormously influential. Traditional Western accounts of Arabic philosophy can thus diverge radically at crucial junctures from the effective history of philosophy within the Islamic tradition.

A second problem with this model is that it overstates the conflict between philosophy and religion. This not difficult to do, especially if one views it through a Christian lens. Yet historically, philosophy within the Islamic tradition has been neither as central nor as doctrinally constrained as its Christian counterpart. Although it has had its historical moments of impressive political patronage (eighth- through tenth-century Baghdad under the 'Abbāsīd caliphate, twelfth-century Andalusia under Almoravid and Almohad rule, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iṣfahān under Ṣafavīd rule, etc.), it has generally occupied a more peripheral and less important position than such traditional Islamic sciences as jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) or even speculative theology (*'ilm al-kalām*). At the same time, philosophy maintained a much greater degree of autonomy from religious authority, in part perhaps because of its own critical temperament, but also because of its relatively marginal status and the decentralized structure of Islam itself. Individual scholars of the traditional sciences (*'ulamā'*) may have critiqued particular aspects of philosophy (al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya) and even issued fatwas declaring the impermissibility of philosophy and logic in general (Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ), but there is no Islamic equivalent to, for example, the Catholic Church's Condemnation of 1277.

One can certainly find an indigenous distinction within the Islamic world between intellect (*'aql*) and tradition (*naql*) as two different ways to arrive at or justify a belief. However, this distinction does not map on easily to the usual Western opposition between reason and authority based on revelation or tradition. For instance, Islamic "traditionalists" have historically accused "rationalists" of blind obedience (*taqlīd*). They thought that Greek-influenced philosophers were often aping their foreign predecessors without really demonstrating their conclusions. This charge will seem perplexing to contemporary Western philosophers, who may assume that traditionalism is synonymous with unquestioning

acceptance of historical or religious authority. Yet figures perceived as clear-cut traditionalists or rationalists in the West are often considerably more ambiguous figures within the Islamic context itself. Take, for instance, two of the greatest Andalusian thinkers, Ibn Ḥazm and the aforementioned Ibn Rushd. Ibn Ḥazm has often been portrayed in Western accounts as a kind of arch-traditionalist, in part because of his affiliation with the Zāhirite theological-juridical school, which was notoriously literalist and insisted on privileging the apparent or external (*zāhir*) sense of religious texts. Yet his views on logic and various theological disputes are actually quite subtle and moderate and he is in fact viewed by many contemporary Arab intellectuals as part of the rationalist legacy of Islam. Ibn Rushd, on the other hand, is often cast in Western histories as the consummate rationalist and even a harbinger of secular modernity. Yet he belonged to the Malikite school of jurisprudence (one of the most conservative of the four Sunnī religious legal movements) and was appointed as the Grand Judge of Cordoba – a position that could only be attained by someone with an unrivaled knowledge of and commitment to Islamic law (*shariʿa*). The reality is that Ibn Rushd, like most philosophers in the Islamic world, saw the claims of reason and revelation as dovetailing harmoniously (contrary to later misinterpretations of the Latin Averroists). Accordingly, the distinction between philosophical proof, theological disputation, and prophetic revelation was oftentimes cast in terms of the intended audience and appropriate method of communication (apodictic demonstration, dialectic, and rhetoric) rather than the actual content or significance of the message itself.

A more specific version of the philosophy–religion conflict thesis was articulated by the Straussian school, which emphasized the primacy of philosophers’ political aims and the necessity of the “art of writing” (Strauss, 1952/88; Butterworth, 1992; Mahdi, 2001). This is an influential approach that has nonetheless generated a good deal of criticism (Leaman, 1985/2001; Gutas, 2002). Setting aside the debate over whether Arabic philosophers employed esoteric strategies of writing to protect themselves (and if so, who is qualified to decide what they actually meant), the question is whether they really needed

so desperately to conceal their doctrines from religio-political authorities. Traditionalist scholars may have been skeptical of the philosophers’ assurances and irked by their apparent elitism – indeed, they condemned their methods and conclusions more than once – but there is little historical evidence that philosophers were ever actually persecuted, let alone executed, for their opinions.

A third problem with the received Western account of Arabic philosophy is that it makes the philosophical tradition of the Islamic world appear much more homogeneous and monolithic than it really is. Almost without exception, the central philosophers in this account belonged to the aforementioned Peripatetic school, which was most indebted to the Greeks. But even within the classical period, there was a plurality of diverse intellectual movements and schools: the Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite theologians, the Ismāʿīlīs, the Ṣūfīs, and the school of Illumination (*ishrāq*). In addition to these, there were various uncategorizable freethinkers, as well as traditionalist jurists and theologians who mounted sophisticated attacks on the philosophers. At the end of this period (the close of the twelfth century) philosophy was for the most part subsumed by theology and mysticism in the Sunnī world (at least for several centuries), but that did not signal its death in the Islamic world overall. Philosophy continued to flourish in Shiʿite-dominated areas (most notably, Persia), as well as in India and Turkey. Independent figures and new syncretic but systematic schools of philosophy emerged well into the modern period, culminating in the ambitious metaphysical synthesis of the school of Iṣfahān. The Rebirth or Renaissance (*naḥḍa*) of the nineteenth century then signaled a reawakening of philosophy in the Sunnī Arab world in response to its engagement with the West. A wide variety of philosophical schools, movements, and projects have subsequently proliferated in the twentieth century, some as an after-effect of the *naḥḍa*, some rooted in centuries-old traditions of thought (for a useful overview by region, see the final section of Nasr and Leaman, 1996).

Of course, few contemporary advocates of the “Arabic philosophy” model would now maintain that it begins and ends with the classical period, that its concerns are reducible to the

clash between reason and revelation, or that it is merely an unimaginative reiteration of classical Greek insights valuable only for its preservative function (see, for example, Gutas, 2002; Adamson and Taylor, 2005; McGinnis and Reisman, 2007; for thoughtful defenses of this rubric). There are, however, lingering problems with the idea of Arabic philosophy. The first is that despite the ad hoc way in which the category has been expanded to embrace post-classical developments, it remains too narrow to do justice to the diverse tradition sketched out above. Some critics of the term have pointed out that very few philosophers before the modern period were actually Arab (most were Persian, some Turkish, Indian, etc.). This, however, misses the point, since as mentioned before the “Arabic” classification has always been first and foremost linguistic. And there is little question that Arabic was the *lingua franca* of philosophical discussion during the classical period. Yet even then, key works were written in Persian as well (e.g. by Ibn Sīnā), and in the post-classical period the majority of philosophical texts were in fact composed in languages other than Arabic (again, most notably Persian, but also Turkish, Urdu, French, and English, among others).

The second point is more substantive. Advocates of the “Arabic” rubric generally see the Greco-Arabic translation movement as the formative moment in the tradition, and thus place a great premium on the Greek origins of Arabic philosophy. This is understandable, since the Greeks are generally taken (at least in the West) to be the progenitors of philosophy. Indeed, Epicurus bragged that “only Greeks philosophize.” But can there be non-Greek forms of philosophy? Specifically, can there be forms of philosophical endeavor in the Islamic world that do not derive from, or even independently approximate, the practice of philosophy produced by the Greeks? To ask this question is to ask what philosophy is, or what it ought to be, and who gets to decide that. One might maintain that only theoretical reflection and ethical cultivation pursued in the classical Greek mode constitutes genuine philosophy. But in that case, many other rich intellectual traditions would be entirely eliminated or at least disfigured beyond recognition. For instance, there is no indigenous word analogous to philosophy in either classical Sanskrit or

Chinese, and neither the traditional Indian *darśanas* nor the Chinese masters would fit the Procrustean bed of the Greeks very comfortably. Indeed, the vast majority of what is considered philosophy in the European tradition would probably be excluded according to this criterion.

The Arabic philosophical tradition occupies a unique place with regard to this question, because since the beginning of the classical period there have been two distinct and etymologically unrelated words for philosophy. One is a loan word from the Greek: *falsafa* (an Arabization of *philosophia*, lit. “love of wisdom”). This term was most often used to describe the thinking and way of life of the Greek-influenced philosophers (*falāsifa*) during the classical period. The second term is an indigenous one that appears in the Qur’ān numerous times: *ḥikma* or “wisdom.” This is used side by side with *falsafa* during the classical period and with even greater frequency after that.

From a classical Greek philosophical perspective, the claim that one is already in possession of wisdom rather than merely desiring and pursuing it might seem indefensibly hubristic (as sophists or “wise men” often appear in Platonic dialogues). Yet the *ḥakīm* is not a *sophistēs*. Philosophers in the Islamic tradition have generally believed that the point of pursuing wisdom is precisely to attain it and enact it, in order to transform and perfect the self (the soteriological function of knowledge is a common theme among most schools). Further, *ḥikma* casts a much wider epistemic net than *falsafa*. It encompasses not just the rational argumentation, conceptual analysis and demonstrative proofs of the Greek-influenced philosophers, but other ostensive sources of knowledge: divine revelation and its exegesis, prophecy, traditions, dialectical speculative theology, authoritative esoteric teachings, intuitive insights, mystical experience, spiritual exercises, and ethical self-cultivation.

Whether or not such things ought legitimately to be considered philosophy is a contentious question (see Nasr, 2006, and Gutas, 2002, for opposing perspectives). It is worth bearing in mind that one could just as easily pose that question about contemporary philosophical activity in Europe or the Americas, none of which preserves the whole character of Greek *philosophia* as a *technē tou biou* or “art of living.” Indeed,

it would seem that Arabic philosophy honors this conception much more genuinely despite modern Western conceits about our Greco-Roman lineage. The crucial point, though, is that this is how philosophy came to be conceived within the Islamic milieu. And if it is to be understood properly, it must be understood first on its own terms and not simply crammed into the heteronomous categories of Greek philosophy or contemporary Western academic practices. The attempt to legislate what is and is not genuine philosophy based on our current assumptions, methods, and concerns – or to acknowledge other traditions only to the extent that they approximate those privileged characteristics – is provincial and dogmatic at best. More often than not, it is merely a thinly veiled form of cultural imperialism.

For any number of these reasons, many scholars have abandoned the category of “Arabic philosophy” altogether and instead speak of “Islamic” philosophy (Corbin, 1964; Fakhry, 1970; Leaman and Nasr, 1996). This rubric seems to cast the net more widely, and it certainly captures some of the movements and historical developments that “Arabic philosophy” has typically excluded (e.g. the Ismā‘īlīs, philosophically informed Ash‘arite theology, traditionalist critics, the *ishrāqī* school, philosophical Sūfism, various later Shi‘ite syntheses). Advocates of this taxonomy emphasize that Islamic philosophy is not simply a short-lived medieval phenomenon, but a flourishing vital tradition that continues to this day. One further advantage of this approach is that it attempts to do justice to the profound and unique influence that Islam has exercised upon philosophy. Yet in doing so, it oftentimes exaggerates the religious dimension.

Henri Corbin characterized Islamic philosophy as *la philosophie prophétique*: “a philosophy whose development, and whose modalities are essentially linked to the religious and spiritual fact of Islam” (Corbin, 1964, pp. xiv–xv). In a similar vein, Seyyed Hossein Nasr defends the idea that Islamic philosophy is derived directly from Islamic revelation, describing it as “essentially a philosophical hermeneutics of the Sacred Text” (Nasr, 1996, p. 37). But this is simply the inverted mirror image of the modern Western assumption that philosophy and religion are by their very nature distinct and antagonistic towards

one another. That essential antagonism has now been replaced by an essential peace, attained only by stripping philosophy of its intellectual autonomy and subordinating it to revealed truths. The question is then whether a philosophy that is merely the handmaid of theology does not cease to be philosophy altogether.

Further, while the category of Islamic philosophy appears to be a more inclusive category than that of Arabic philosophy, one may ask whether it is in some respects too inclusive. Some critics of this approach have complained that it ends up granting primacy to the mystical, esoteric, and even exegetical elements of the tradition, at the expense of logical analysis, rational disputation, and independent critical inquiry (Gutas, 2002). Indeed, philosophy is redefined so broadly here that it becomes synonymous with any kind of intellectual or spiritual activity. As mentioned earlier, Islamic philosophy must be approached first on its own terms and not simply crammed into alien categories if it is to be properly appreciated. But this is not to say that emic perspectives automatically trump etic perspectives, or cannot be held accountable to anything other than their own unexamined assumptions. Such a claim would be sheer dogmatism and deeply unphilosophical. It is thus still legitimate – indeed, it is incumbent on us when engaging in cross-cultural philosophy – to ask again and again the question of what philosophy is and what it ought to be.

An additional problem with the “Islamic” rubric is that not all thinkers in this tradition produced philosophical work that was actually Islamic, in the sense of being “derived directly from the Islamic revelation” (Nasr, 1996, p. 37, n.1). While a great many philosophers in this milieu have certainly perceived themselves as deeply religious people, it was not uncommon for them to be accused of illegitimate innovation (*bid‘a*) or even unbelief (*kufr*) by more traditionalist voices. To dismiss such criticisms as provincial or unrepresentative would be grossly to underestimate their sophistication, authority, and influence. Many philosophers did arguably introduce intellectual innovations that took considerable liberties with the apparent sense of scripture. Particularly during the classical period, the aforementioned harmony between philosophy and Islam was often achieved by bending the latter to the former: many effectively

made revelation answerable to the claims of reason. Some even eschewed key Islamic tenets such as the reality of prophecy, the immortality of the soul, and the prospect of reward and punishment in an afterlife. This is not to deny the enormous significance and influence of Islam on philosophy. Sometimes philosophical reflection has preserved and clarified and defended Islamic doctrines and practices, sometimes it has appropriated and reinterpreted them, and sometimes it has critiqued and rejected them. It should be noted as well that sometimes it simply has had nothing to do with them, as is the case with the enormous body of work on logic. To insist that all thought that emerged within the Islamic world is somehow directly derived from (or even always in accordance with) Qur'anic revelation, and thus that it is essentially and steadfastly Islamic, would be to ignore or radically misrepresent some of its most important and influential voices. In short, the "Islamic" rubric makes the tradition appear much more univocal than it really is.

For these reasons, some scholars have preferred to employ the more cautious rubric of "Muslim" philosophy (Sharif, 1961/99). This would then encompass all philosophy created by those who *called* themselves Muslims, setting aside the question of whether their philosophy was really strictly speaking Islamic in the aforementioned sense. This constitutes an improvement over the religious essentialism of the "Islamic" rubric, but it remains too narrow, because a significant number of thinkers who were not even nominally Muslim played a considerable role in this tradition as teachers, translators, and philosophical interlocutors. Some important Arabic-speaking philosophers in the Islamic world were Jews, some were Christians, some were pagan Sabians, and some were *zanādiqa*, i.e. Manichean dualists or, more loosely, heretical freethinkers. A number of this last group evinced a strong skepticism and hostility toward revealed religions, not excepting Islam. In this respect at least, the "Arabic" rubric is actually preferable to the "Islamic" and "Muslim" taxonomies, since it recognizes a good many figures that they would exclude.

Ultimately, the most appropriate rubric for capturing the unique diversity of this intellectual tradition might simply be Marshall G. S. Hodgson's awkward but useful term "Islamicate,"

which "refer[s] not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims" (Hodgson, 1974, vol. 1, p. 59). Applied to the study of philosophy, it would encompass any thought that emerges within a societal context predominately informed by the religious, political, and cultural dimensions of Islam, whether or not its presuppositions and conclusions are necessarily Islamic. This casts the net widely enough to capture the entirety of the tradition, without pretending to subordinate all the diverse forms of philosophical inquiry to the revealed truths of Islam, or ignoring non-Muslims who played an important role in the historical dialogue. It also remains truer to the protean spirit of philosophy, by signifying a provisional starting point, rather than making monolithic claims about its doctrines, the behavior of the people who produce it, or even the language through which it is expressed.

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**Islamic studies** Given the vast scope of Islamic studies, in terms of subject matter, history, and geography, this brief account will limit itself to indicating certain crucial developments and suggesting the ways in which major modern theories have begun to make incursions into analyses of Islam. Traditionally, Islamic scholarship